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AUTHOR Brander, Peggy; Magnelli, Giovanna; Oetjens, Tamara; Seagren, Bethany

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ABSTRACT

This research described strategies used to improve the reading fluency of students. The targeted populations consisted of first, second, and third grade classes from middle class communities located in the Midwest. Evidence for the existence of this problem included teacher observation, parent surveys, and lack of progress shown on reading assessments. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students demonstrated a lack of reading fluency related to absence of exposure to literacy, influence of media and technology, self-esteem, and economic strain limiting quality family time. Educators have found that this decrease of reading fluency has affected students' abilities in all curricular areas. A review of solution strategies revealed that a balanced approach is the most effective way for students to improve reading fluency. It is the responsibility of educators to identify the way each individual child learns. The strategies that have proven successful are the use of multiple intelligences, a balanced approach between phonics and whole language, increased family and community involvement, and more individual attention while reading, for each child. The results of this research showed an increase in the reading fluency of the students. Pre-intervention data compared to post-intervention data reflected a significant increase in ability and motivation to read. It is the opinion of the researchers that these intervention strategies continue to be utilized in the classroom to further the development of reading. (Contains 30 references and 15 figures of data. Appendixes contain the consent form, student, teacher, and parent survey instruments, and tally sheets.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING THE READING FLUENCY OF STUDENTS IN THE PRIMARY GRADES

Peggy Brander
Giovanna Magnelli
Tamara Oetjens
Bethany Seagren

An Action Research Project Submitted to the graduate Faculty of the

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Advisor

Advisor

Beverly Gulley

Dean, School of Education

Abstract

This research described strategies used to improve the reading fluency of students. The targeted populations consisted of first, second, and third grade classes from middle class communities located in the Midwest. Evidence for the existence of this problem included teacher observation, parent surveys, and lack of progress shown on reading assessments.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students demonstrated a lack of reading fluency related to absence of exposure to literacy, influence of media and technology, self-esteem, and economic strain limiting quality family time. Educators have found that this decrease of reading fluency has affected students' abilities in all curricular areas.

A review of solution strategies revealed that a balanced approach is the most effective way for students to improve reading fluency. It is the responsibility of educators to identify the way each individual child learns. The strategies that have proven successful are the use of multiple intelligences, a balanced approach between phonics and whole language, increased family and community involvement, and more individual attention while reading, for each child.

The results of this research showed an increase in the reading fluency of the students. Pre-intervention data compared to post-intervention data reflected a significant increase in ability and motivation to read. It is the opinion of the researchers that these intervention strategies continue to be utilized in the classroom to further the development of reading.

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement and Context

General Statement of the Problem

The students of the targeted first, second, and third grade classes demonstrated a lack of fluency in oral reading that impeded their comprehension. Evidence for the existence of this problem included teacher observation, parent surveys and lack of progress shown on reading assessments.

Immediate Problem Context

For the purpose of this study, we will refer to our schools as Sites A, B, and C. Site A has two teachers in the same building and district, with Sites B and C being different schools and districts.

School

Site A Description

Site A has been providing educational services since 1928. The brick building stretches across a square block within a residential area. A field, playground and

baseball diamond are enclosed within a wrought iron fence on the school grounds. The three-story building accommodates classrooms for kindergarten through eighth grade with an enrollment of 485 students. The majority of the students are from the community and are able to walk to school. There are three buses that provide transportation for children from the inner city, due to low enrollment, and students receiving special education. The racial-ethnic grouping consists of 68.9% Caucasian, 18.4% Hispanic, 7.8% African-American, 4.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% Native-American. Most of the students come from middle class families. Approximately 25.8% of the students receive public aid due to low income. The school does not have a chronic truancy problem and the average daily attendance record is 94.6%. However, the student mobility is 14.3%. These are the students who were enrolled or left the school in mid-year (School Report Card, 1999).

Site A classrooms have an average class size of 27.5 students. Recently, a phone system was installed in each classroom. All classrooms have an Apple computer with various programs. The school is also equipped with a library and adjacent computer lab accessible to students twice a week. Site A has a physical education program, art program, and music program. The children attend physical education one period a week for 40 minutes. They have art one period a week for an hour, and music is once a week for a half an hour. Students in the targeted classrooms are exposed to140 minutes of language arts daily, 60 minutes of mathematics daily, and 55 minutes of social studies and science daily. Fourth grade students have the option of joining the school band. Site A provides services for students with special needs and inclusion children. Site A receives Chapter 1 funds and provides tutorial

services weekly. The school participates in the Lighthouse Program that provides at-risk children with tutoring services. Speech teachers, communicative disorders specialists and social workers are also available if necessary.

Site B Description

Site B is a one-school, school district that has been serving the community since 1876. Site B school and district are one and the same and will be included in the description. The two story brick building is located in a small residential neighborhood with two large playground areas used for recess activities and a baseball diamond and grassy field used for physical education classes and various community programs. The school serves students from early childhood through eighth grade with an enrollment of 574 students. The racial-ethnic background of the students consists of 90.6% Caucasian, 5.4% Hispanic, 3.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.3% Native-American, and 0.2% African-American. The majority of the students come from middle class families. Approximately 12% of the students come from low-income households receiving public aid. The Limited-English-Proficient students include 30.1% of the population who are eligible for transitional bilingual education. The school does not have a chronic truancy problem. The average daily attendance record is 95.7% with a student mobility rate of 8.9% (School Report Card, 1999).

Site B has an average class size of 23 students. Each classroom is equipped with one to three Apple computers, all of which have Internet access. The school has two technology labs. One is a Mac lab with 25 computers serving early childhood through fourth grade. The other lab is a Microsoft lab with 30 computers serving fifth

through eighth grade students. Computer class is provided once a week for one-half hour. The students are also given opportunities to use either lab at available times in the day. The students have one-half hour five days a week with a physical education program. Art, music and library programs are also available for one-half hour once a week each. The students are also given the opportunity to explore foreign language with Italian being offered twice a week for twenty minute per class. Fifth through eighth grade students have the option of joining the school band which performs several times throughout the school year. Within the regular classroom, students receive 145 minutes per day of language arts instruction, 60 per day of math, and 50 minutes per day of social studies and science.

Site B provides services for special needs and inclusion children. Remedial reading is provided for children who qualify for the program. A gifted program titled Activities in Critical Thinking (A.C.T.) is provided for identified children in kindergarten through eighth grade. One speech teacher and one social worker are available for the children who qualify for the services. Two full-time teachers and an aide provide bilingual education and English as a Second Language services for qualifying students. Finally, two after school programs are offered to children who need additional homework support. One is for students in second through fifth grade, and the other program is for students in sixth through eighth grade (School Report Card, 1999).

Site C Description

Site C has been servicing the community since 1923. It is part of a school district that has ten schools. It is a brick building that extends across a square block

within a residential area. A playground, two baseball diamonds, and a field are enclosed on the school grounds. The three-story building accommodates classrooms for kindergarten through sixth grade with an enrollment of 284 students. The racial-ethnic consists of 49.6% Caucasian, 46.5% African-American, 2.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.4% Hispanic, 0.4% Native American. Most of the students come from middle class families. Approximately 7.7% of the students receive public aid due to low income. The school does not have a chronic truancy problem and the average daily attendance record is 93.1% However, the student mobility is 10.0%. These are students who were enrolled or left school mid-year (School Report Card, 1999).

Site C has an average class size of 20 students. All the classrooms have at least one Imac computer that has Internet access. Each classroom also has a television and VCR. The school has a computer lab with 25 Imac computers. Students have computer class once a week for 45 minutes. The students at Site C attend physical education and art one period a week for 65 minutes each. Music meets twice a week for 35 minutes each time. Students are given the opportunity to explore foreign language with Spanish, French and German being offered twice a week for 25 minutes during lunch. Fourth graders are given the option of joining the school band (School Report Card, 1999).

Students in the targeted classroom spend 180 minutes a day on language arts instruction, 60 minutes a day is spent on mathematics, and 45 minutes is spent on social studies/science. The targeted classroom has one Imac, an Apple computer, and two Waterford computers. The Waterford computer is a new program to the district that is designed for students in kindergarten through second grade.

Site C provides services for special needs and inclusion children. Remedial reading is provided for children who qualify for the program. A gifted program is provided for students in first through sixth grade. Two speech and language pathologists and a number of social workers are available for those students who qualify for their services. There is an after school program available three times a week to help students with their homework (School Report Card 1999).

District

District A

There are four regions within the district; Site A operates within Region 1. The teachers within the district are 45.3% Caucasian, 41.1% African-American, 11.0% Hispanic, 2.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.4% Native-American. Among the teachers, 76.7% are female and 23.3% are male. Salaries for teachers average $48,879. Salaries for administrators average $84,165. The district has an average teaching experience of 14.8 years and 45.1% of the teachers have a masters degree or higher (School Report Card, 1999).

Site A spends 76.7% of its income on education, 13% on site and construction/capital improvement, 6.5% on operations and maintenance, 2.3% on bond and interest and 1.5% on rent. The total operating expenditure per pupil is $7,325 (School Report Card, 1999).

District B

The total number of teachers employed by the district is 37. Among the

teacher's 100% are Caucasian with 78.1% being female and 21.9% male. The average teacher's salary is $48,179. The average administrator's salary is $94,160. The average teaching experience in the district in 17.2 years Thirty-one and a half percent of the teachers have bachelors degrees, while 68.5% of the teachers have a masters degree or above (School Report Card, 1999).

Site B spends 53.6% of its income on operations and maintenance, 41.5% on education, 2.4% on bond and interest, 1.2% on municipal retirement and social security, 0.8% on transportation, and 0.6% on fire prevention and safety. The total operating expenditure per pupil is $6,517 (School Report Card, 1999).

District C

The total number of teachers employed by the district is 355. Among the teachers in the district 84.1% are Caucasian, 13.1% are African-American, 1.7% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.1% are Hispanic. Among the teachers 82.0% are female and 18.0% are male. Salaries for teachers average $50,407. Salaries for administrators average $89,778. The district has an average teaching experience of 15.7 years and 70.2% of the teachers have a masters degree or higher (School Report Card, 1999).

Site C spends 74.1% of it's income on education, 10.8% on operations and maintenance, 8.0% on bond and interest, 3.3% on transportation, 2.4% on municipal retirement/social security, and 1.4% on fire prevention and safety. The total operating expenditure per pupil is $7,134 (School Report Card, 1999).

Community

Site A is located approximately 15 miles west of a large midwestern city. The average median household income is $55,831. Homes in this area have a median value of $189,000. The current population is 35,405. The local library offers a variety of reading programs throughout the year. The also sponsor a summer reading program for the children. Students enjoy two parks within the community. It sponsors a variety of youth programs including soccer, baseball, football, basketball, and swimming. The students also benefit from having a forest preserve nearby. The children frequent the bike trails as well as the seasonal activities the preserve provides.

Site B is in a well-maintained community with tree-lined streets located approximately 12 miles west of a midwestern city. It is actually considered to be an "island within a city", because in all directions, north, south, east, and west, one is led back to the city. The school houses students from two different suburbs. The current population is 7,958 people. The average median household income is $44,030. The median home value is $210,000. The community is highly involved in providing a safe and happy environment for the children. The police department works with students in fifth and eighth grade in the D.A.R.E. program. The school Parent/Teacher Association supports and sponsors several school activities. The Parent/Teacher Association also organizes parents as classroom volunteers to work with the teachers throughout the school year. The community library has a summer reading program for the children.

The park district offers a variety of sport programs, including baseball, hockey,

soccer, and basketball. Dance and gymnastics are also available. The park district provides before and after school care in conjunction with the school district, along with many other summer programs.

Site C is located nine miles west of a large midwestern city. Site C is a "community trying hard to mix the vitality of urban life with quaint, Victorian charm" (local newspaper, 2000). The average median household income is $82,171. The homes in the area have a median value $193,000. The current population is 50,090. The community is very involved in providing a safe environment for all residents. There are three public libraries that offer programs for the residents. Site C has a Parent/Teacher Organization that sponsors many school activities. The Parents/Teacher Organization also helps to organize parent volunteers to work in the school.

The park district has seven community centers, three swimming pools, a gymnastic center, a conservatory, and a seasonal indoor ice rink. The park district offers a variety of sports programs, including, soccer, volleyball, roller hockey, ice hockey, floor hockey, and basketball. A variety of art classes as well as dance classes are also offered. During the summer the park district also offers a variety of summer programs.

National Context

Recently there has been a growing concern among educators over the lack of fluency in students' oral reading skills. This lack of fluency has impeded their ability to become proficient oral readers. "Some 40% of fourth graders were reading below the

'basic level' according to the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress" (Manzo, 1998). When students are unable to read at grade level they are affected academically and socially. Reading ability develops over time and readers read differently at different stages in their development. Part of the process of learning how to read requires the readers to use different strategies as well as having an understanding of when and how to use them (Effective Reading Instruction, 1995). According to Alvermann and Guthrie (1993), "Students who are fluent readers are more motivated, knowledgeable, socially interactive, and strategic" (Dowhower, 1999).

Nationally, students are demonstrating limited word attack skills and are struggling with new words. Weak vocabulary, poor spelling, and few opportunities to read outside of school are part of this same problem (Hong, 1997). Furthermore, when a child displays poor fluency skills there is a strong connection with being unable to comprehend what is read. Teachers become frustrated trying to help a room full of readers who are struggling with reading fluency while keeping literacy fun. The students become aware of their difficulties with reading and also become frustrated. They strive to be as fluent as the other readers in class. However, this is difficult for the reader with low self-esteem and a lack of motivation to achieve. Readers who struggle are in need of long-term interventions (Lyon, 1998).

In their daily instruction, the readers also need an effective reading program (Hester, 1999). Teachers across the country have struggled to find strategies to meet the needs of all their students. The greatest controversy is being whole language versus phonics-based instruction. Once teachers determine the needs of the students in their classrooms, they need to implement a balanced approach of whole language

and phonics to teach reading. Educators have always known that children learn differently and at different times. Therefore, no one method will fit all students (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to document the reading fluency of the targeted classrooms, the teachers administered surveys and miscue analyses. The research determined reading fluency, instructional level, and attitudes toward reading.

Within the first month, the teachers documented the reading fluency, interest, and instructional levels of all students. Surveys were distributed to the students, parents, and colleagues. The students completed surveys regarding their reading interests and attitudes (Appendix D-F). The parents completed surveys about their children's feelings toward reading in school and at home (Appendix G-H). Colleagues completed surveys regarding change in reading fluency (Appendix C).

In order to determine the reading fluency of each student, miscue analyses were administered. Students were given a grade appropriate passage to read aloud (Appendix I-T). They were rated accordingly to the ratio of errors made versus the total number of words in the passage.

The miscue analyses demonstrated the need to improve reading fluency. The findings of the surveys indicated that students enjoyed reading. The parent surveys revealed that their children had a low comfort level while reading aloud in class. The outcome of the colleague surveys indicated that there are many factors affecting reading fluency.

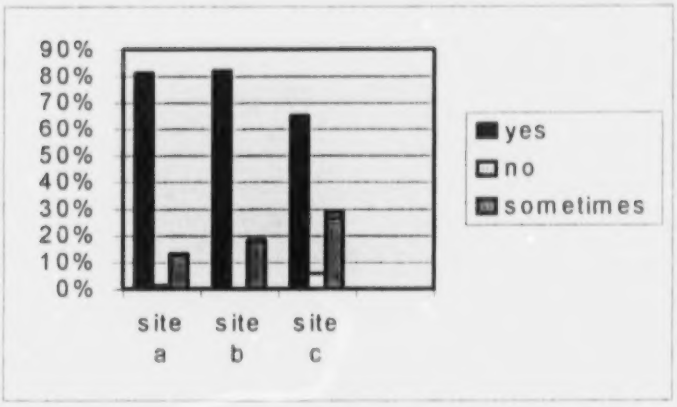


Figure 1

Figure 1 Percentage of the targeted students who enjoy reading during the month of October of the 2000-2001 school year

When the targeted students of Site A, which consists of two classrooms, were asked whether they enjoyed reading. The teacher administered the questionnaire during school hours. Responses to the survey were given through written expression. Eighty-one percent of the children responded that they did enjoy reading. Thirteen percent of the students stated that they enjoyed reading some of the time, while 1% did not enjoy reading. Site B had a similar response of 82% of the students whom enjoyed reading. Eighteen percent enjoyed reading some of the time, while none of the participants expressed a dislike for reading. Site C responded slightly lower with 65% of the students enjoying reading. Twenty-nine percent of the students were somewhat interested in reading, while 6% did not enjoy reading.

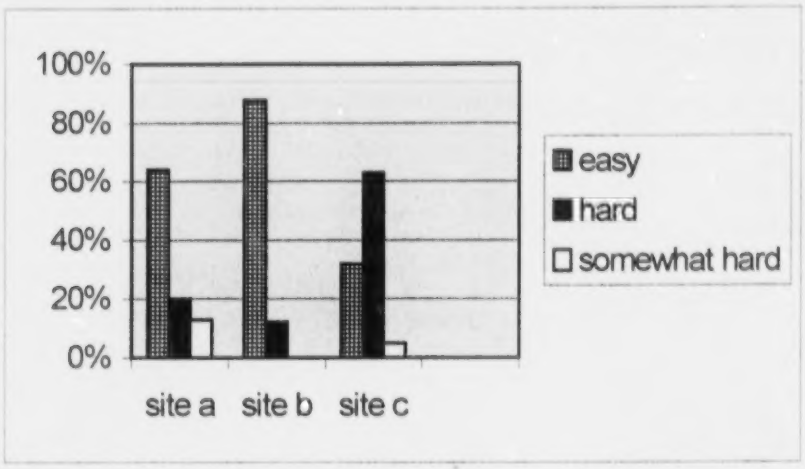


Figure 2

Figure 2 The range in which the targeted students show their level of reading ability

The students at Site A responded to a questionnaire that was administered by the teacher during school hours as to whether or not reading was easy or hard. Sixty-four percent found it to be an easy skill. Thirteen percent felt that it was somewhat difficult, while 20% found that it was hard. Site B was overwhelmingly high with 88% finding reading to be easy. Only 12% found it to be a difficult task, while none found it to be somewhat difficult. Site C had a lower response with only 32% finding reading to be easy. Five percent found that reading could be somewhat difficult, while 63% said that reading was indeed hard.

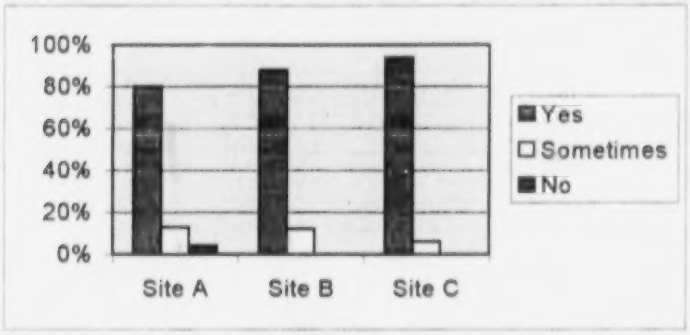


Figure 3

Figure 3 Percentage of targeted students who are read to by family members

Site A sent the self-evaluation of reading concepts home to be completed by students and their families. The teacher administered the self-evaluation to the students of Site B and C during class times. Site A reported that family members read to 80% of the students. Thirteen percent are read to sometimes, while 4% are not read to at home. Site B found that 88% of the students are read to at home. Twelve percent are read to some of the time, while none of the students responded to a lack of reading in the home. The results from Site C found that 94% are read to at home. Six percent are read to sometimes, and none of the students responded to a lack of reading at home.

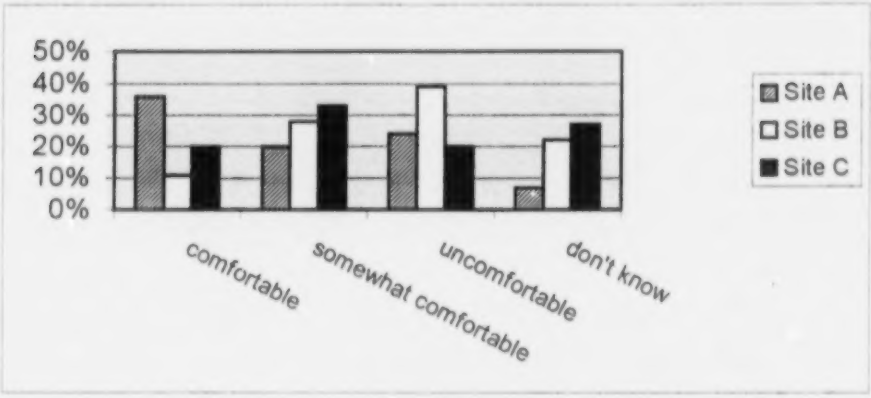


Figure 4

Figure 4 Parent survey measuring their child's comfort level while reading aloud in class

Site A data reflects 36% of the parents responded that their child is comfortable reading aloud in class. There were 20% who felt they were somewhat comfortable, 24% uncomfortable, and 7% that did not know their child's comfort level. Site B showed 11% of the parents responding that their child felt comfortable reading aloud in front of the class. 28% felt their child to be somewhat comfortable, 39% uncomfortable, and 22% of the parents did not know. Site C responded with 20% of the parents feeling that their child was comfortable reading aloud. 33% felt that their child was somewhat comfortable, 20% uncomfortable, and 27% did not know their child's comfort level.

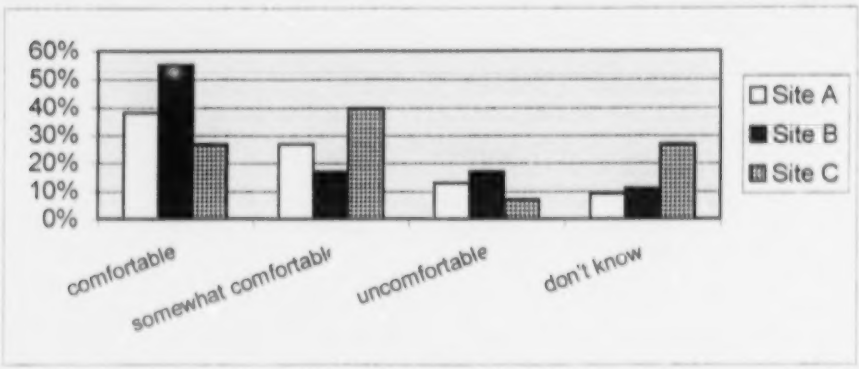


Figure 5

Figure 5 Parent survey measuring their child's comfort level while reading to the teacher

A reading attitude inventory was sent home for the parents to complete measuring their children's comfort level while reading to the teacher. Questionnaires were returned within a week. Site A data reflects 38% of the parents responding that their children are comfortable reading to the teacher. There were 27% who felt they were somewhat comfortable, 13% uncomfortable, and 9% that did not know their children's comfort level. Site B showed 55% of the parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading aloud to the teacher. Seventeen percent felt their children to be somewhat comfortable, 17% uncomfortable, and 11% of the parents did not know. Site C responded with 27% of the parents feeling that their children were comfortable reading aloud. Forty percent felt that their children were somewhat comfortable, 7% uncomfortable, and 27% did not know their children's comfort level.

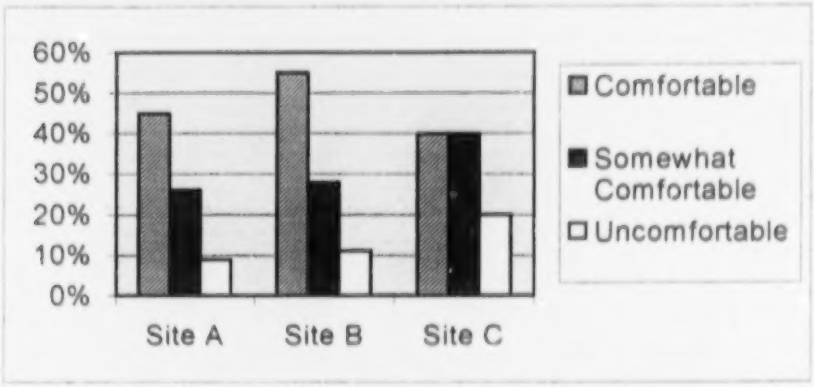


Figure 6

Figure 6 Parent survey measuring their children's feelings about their ability to read orally

A reading attitude inventory was administered to the parents measuring their children's feelings about their ability to read orally. The survey was returned within a week. Site A data reflects 45% of the parents responding that their children felt confident reading orally. There were 26% who felt they were somewhat comfortable, 9% uncomfortable, and 1% that did not know their children's comfort level. Site B showed 55% of the parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading aloud. Twenty-eight percent felt their children to be somewhat comfortable, 11% uncomfortable, and 6% of the parents did not know. Site C responded with 40% of the parents feeling that their children were comfortable reading aloud. Forty percent felt that their children were somewhat comfortable, 20% uncomfortable, and none of the parents responded to a lack of knowledge about their children's comfort level.

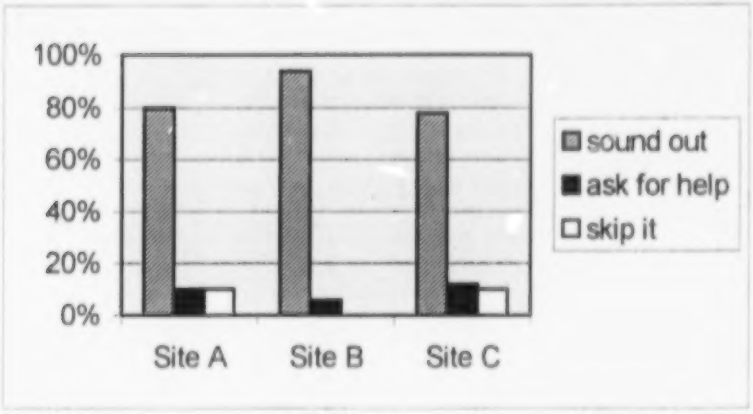


Figure 7

Figure 7 Survey measuring the strategies used for decoding unfamiliar words

The teacher administered a reading survey to the students to determine the strategies used for decoding unfamiliar words. Site A data reflects 80% of the students responded that the strategy used to figure out unfamiliar words was sounding it out. Ten percent of the students asked for help when encountered with an unfamiliar word, and 10% chose to skip the word altogether. Site B found that 94% of the students sound out unfamiliar words, while 6% ask for help. None of the students responded that they skipped unfamiliar words. Site C had 78% of the students sounding out words. Twelve percent of the students asked for help, and 10% skipped the unfamiliar word.

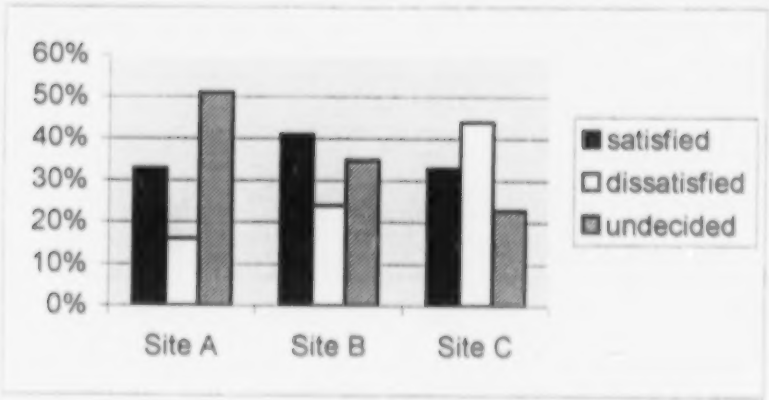


Figure 8

Figure 8 Parent Questionnaire regarding the progress of their children in reading

A questionnaire was sent home to the parents measuring the progress of their children in reading. The survey was returned within a week. Site A responded with 33% of the parents feeling that their children's reading progress was satisfactory. Sixteen percent were concerned with their children's progress, and 51% were undecided. Site B had 41% of the parents who were satisfied with their children's reading progress. Twenty-four percent addressed concerns with their progress, and 35% were undecided. Site C had 33% of the parents who felt satisfied with their children's reading progress. Forty-four percent expressed concerns and 23% were undecided.

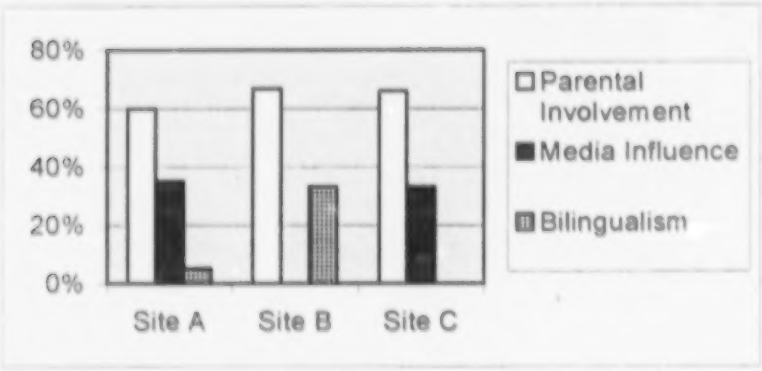


Figure 9

Figure 9 Teacher questionnaire regarding factors influencing reading fluency

The twelve teachers who were selected to complete the surveys returned them indicating that there has been a significant difference in reading fluency over the years. The teachers returned the surveys within three weeks. Site A responded with 60% of the teachers feeling that the lack of involvement at home influenced oral reading. Thirty-five percent felt that the media and other technology have also influenced the students' progress in reading fluency. Only 5% felt that children with a bilingual background are affected in the area of reading fluency. Teachers from Site B felt 67% of the students were affected because of less parental involvement due to career demands. Thirty-three percent of the teachers felt that children who come from bilingual homes are affected and none of them responded to the media influence. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers at Site C felt that parental involvement contributed to reading fluency. Thirty-three percent of the teachers felt media played a significant role in the decline of reading fluency. None recognized bilingual issues related to reading fluency.

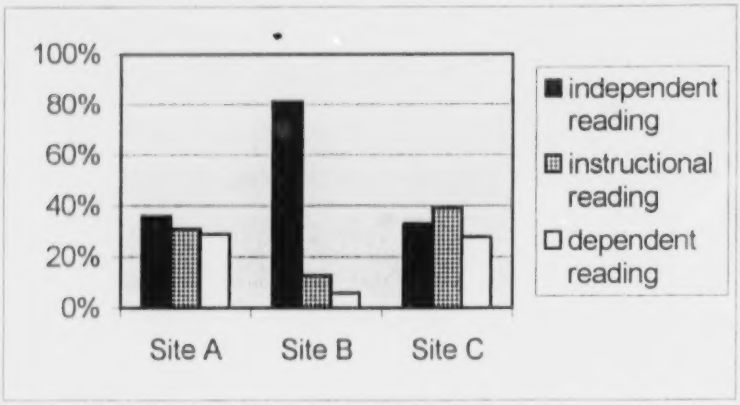


Figure 10

Figure 10 Summary of miscue analysis

The teacher administered a miscue analysis test on an individual basis once per quarter. Site A found that 36% of the students were reading at an independent level. Thirty-one percent of the students were functioning at an instructional reading level. Twenty-nine percent of the students were at a dependent reading level. Site B found that 81% of the students were reading at an independent level. Thirteen percent were reading at an instructional level and 6% were at a dependent reading level. Thirty-three percent of the students at Site C were at an independent reading level. Thirty-nine percent of the students were at an instructional reading level and 28% were at a dependent reading level.

In conclusion, the students are in need of additional supports regarding reading fluency. We have found that the children need an increase of exposure in reading orally. Therefore, we anticipate positive reading growth amongst our students through this action research.

Probable Causes

According to research, a cause for poor reading fluency is students growing up in low socio-economic environments (Rush, 1999). This can cause a problem for students because they may not get the same support from home, as do students from higher socio-economic environments. Students who come from low socio-economic environments may start school with skills that are lower than their classmates (Juel, 1988 as cited in Rush, 1999). Good's study (as cited in Rush 1999) states that they may have a difficult time progressing at the same rate as other students.

"Growing numbers of children are unable to read grade appropriate material--as many as 70 - 80% in some inner city schools and 30% in some suburban schools"(Honig, 1997 p. 15). Nationwide, experts have found evidence that reading difficulties are associated with social, economic, and psychological problems (Pikulski, 1994). According to the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) 1998 Reading Assessment (1999), students of low economic status had lower reading scores than those of middle to high economic status.

For some children the process of learning to read comes with ease. "However, the magic of this effortless journey into reading is available to only about five percent of our nation's children. It is suggested in the research literature that another 20% to 30% learn to read relatively easily once exposed to a formal education. Unfortunately, it appears that for about 60% of our nation's children, learning to read is a much more formidable challenge, and for at least 20% to 30% of these youngsters, reading is one of the most difficult tasks they will have to master throughout the rest of their schooling"

(Lyons, 1998, pp3). These statistics are tragic considering learning to read is one of the tools to success in life.

> Anywhere from 10% to 15% of children with reading disabilities drop out of school prior to high school graduation. A quick survey of adolescents and young adults with histories of delinquent or criminal conduct indicates that approximately half have reading difficulties, and similar rates of reading failure are seen among kids with substance abuse problems. No doubt, their occupational and vocational independence and success are compromised. As such a reading disability is not only an educational problem; it is a major public health and economic concern (Lyon as cited in SEDL, 1999, pp 1).

As educators, we know that for children to be successful readers they must be taught using a balanced approach. A contributor to reading difficulties is that "basal reading approaches still dominate reading instruction, and fluency is rarely viewed as an important component of the instructional package" (Rasinski, Zutell, 1989 p.15).

> One of the most compelling findings from recent research is that children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up. As several studies have now documented, the poor first grader almost invariably continues to be a poor reader throughout high school. The consequences of a slow start in reading become monumental as they accumulate exponentially over time. These consequences range from negative attitudes towards reading, reduced opportunities for vocabulary growth, missed opportunities of reading comprehension strategies, and less actual

practice in reading than other children receive (Torgesen, 1998 pp 1).

The focus of a reading curriculum should include many key factors. When fluency is not taught as one of the components, the children's reading skills will suffer. Kartch (1999) feels that most reading instruction focuses on comprehension and vocabulary. With the absence of oral reading instruction, the children will not be able to develop their reading skills to their highest potential. To successfully teach reading, one needs to incorporate comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and oral reading instruction. According to Nathan and Stanovich, fluency may be almost a necessary condition for good comprehension and enjoyable reading experiences (Nathan & Stanovich, 1991). One can define the goal of reading instruction as a tool to help children interact meaningfully with a variety of texts. They must be competent in word recognition, read at a suitable rate, and understand how to project the phrasing and expressions of the spoken word upon the written word (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

The inability to understand cultural differences and how they affect each child's performance can alter a child's reading. In an oral reading assessment, a child's native language or dialect can affect performance. Debbie Diller, a teacher in a large urban community in the southern United States, found that she was not connecting with her students. There can be a mismatch between the teacher and students that affects their learning (Diller, 1999). Each child brings her own language and culture into the classroom. This alone can create a division between the teacher and the students. Inevitably, it will affect their reading.

English as a Second Language (ESL) students experience reading difficulties. Many of these students struggle to engage in literacy-related activities in the classroom

because they feel unsuccessful (Koskinen, et al., 1999). Many second-language learners become frustrated when they experience failure while trying to keep pace with their English-speaking peers. Even more of a concern, Garcia (as cited in Koskinen, et al., 1999), found that Hispanic students had a 40% higher drop-out rate than English-speaking students. Furthermore, these students face challenges in school and at home. Many parents of these children cannot assist them with reading support and are limited in resources to provide the necessary tools their children need to succeed.

When children come to school lacking the preparation needed to begin reading, it can be very frustrating. Suskin (as cited in Richardson, 1998) believes that the evidence of the support a child receives at home is obvious from the moment they pick up a book. An early lack of emphasis on reading with children can establish lifelong patterns that are nearly impossible to erase (Richardson, 1998).

A deficiency in the parent/child relationship is a crucial factor in the cause of reading difficulties. Many educators have found that there is a lack of parental home support in their school districts. A major finding from NAEP 1998 Reading Assessment (1999) reported that students who read fewer pages for homework had lower reading scores than students who read more pages in school and at home. It is not that parents are unaware of the importance of education, they just may be unable to identify their role in it. According to Weil (1998), " Parents work more hours than ever, and demands on their time at their jobs have increased, making them unable to be as involved in their children's education as they would like" (p. 4). Parents, who come home late and exhausted, find it difficult to make reading together a high priority. Thus, the children are left to have literacy experiences through the use of television,

computers, and video games. Finding quality time within a given day and exposing their children to literature becomes a struggle. Many reading problems could be resolved in the early childhood years if parents took an active role in exposing their children to early literacy experiences. According to a study conducted by the National Research Council on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children (1998), the possibility that reading will be delayed or impeded is greater in students who enter school with less prior knowledge and a lack of access to literacy-stimulating preschool experiences. Bloom (1998) confirms the importance of early literacy experiences through his study, finding that children who do not get adequate home support in the first six years of elementary school will most likely not learn to their abilities.

"Children's oral language skills must be nurtured and background knowledge and exposure to a rich array of experiences need to be developed" (Bryant, 1999 p. 1 pp. 2). When students lack reading experiences with adult role models, they have difficulties with reading fluency (Rush, 1999). Children need to have role models in their lives who demonstrate the importance of reading. Modeling reading to children helps show the importance of being a good reader. According to Anderson's study (as cited in Rush 1999 pp. 2), "It is essential that children have a number of interactions with adults that facilitate language development and promote early literacy skills." Children need to have many reading experiences from home. When children do not have this exposure their reading skills can be delayed. It also affects their reading fluency skills.

Honig (1997) explains, "Reading failure can be prevented if schools just applied what is known about beginning reading instruction."(p.15). Through his research, he found that children with poor decoding and word attack skills were the most at risk for

reading failure. He also contends that students who are not taught basic phonemic awareness and letter recognition in kindergarten, and phonics and decoding in first grade, may never learn to read at grade level without intervention. "At the heart of the debate over phonics and whole language, is the charge that teachers don't teach the 'right way', that the cause is poor teacher preparation and that, consequently, students in the U.S. are failing to learn to read on a scale unparalleled in our history" (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 10). Far too many schools that have adopted a whole language approach to teaching reading, de-emphasize the phonics aspect of a needed balanced approach to reading instruction (Honig, 1997). Therefore, teachers who are prevented by their school districts from using alternative methods with students who are in need will find that they may not achieve reading success.

Whether a teacher uses phonics or not can determine the success of her reading program. Recently, a survey was conducted to find out how phonics was being implemented in the early years. The study showed that preschool teachers tend to use a less traditional approach to teaching phonics. They do not rely upon commercial materials to teach the children letter-sound relationships. The study also showed that the kindergarten through second grade teachers rely much more heavily on commercial products, and do not implement a combined approach between contextual experiences and explicit instruction (Morrow, 1997).

The question remains how to instruct at-risk readers. "A recent national survey of elementary school teachers revealed that many were unsure of how to meet the needs of readers who struggle" (Duffy & Hester, 1999, p.481). "The critical importance of the teacher in the prevention of reading difficulties must be recognized, and efforts

should be made to provide all teachers with adequate knowledge about reading. It is imperative that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction in optimizing literacy (Winters, 1998).

"One of the reasons why many children 'fall through the cracks' in language learning programs is that they aren't receiving sufficient modeling when they need it" (Carbo, 1996 p. 84). Children need to live in a world where their lives are enriched with reading. They need to have role models who read to them every day. If children do not have oral reading modeled early in their lives they are at a disadvantage with those who come from a home that is immersed in language. Children also "need to hear good reading modeled repeatedly before they try to read on their own" (Carbo, 1996, p. 84). When children have reading modeled for them they are able to hear dramatic pauses, changes in tone, and other elements that are crucial to reading fluently. Unfortunately, many students lack these experiences and exposure.

Reading fluency is considered the "neglected goal of reading instruction" (Allington, 1983, as cited in Rasinski, 1994 pp. 2). Students have poor reading fluency because it is something that is not taught as a subject area. Fluency is not a skill that is generally taught in most traditional reading programs (Rasinski, 1994). It is assumed that students will develop good fluency over time.

Through this literature review, it has become evident that students may experience reading difficulties if they are not taught decoding skills in the early years, lack home support, come from a low-economic background, or are non-English speaking students. Research has found that children who read every day have the best chances of becoming competent readers. Daily practice of reading in school and at

home may not only increase fluency, but may also encourage both literacy habits and literary appreciation"(NAEP, 1998, p. 8). It is our responsibility as teachers to help struggling readers succeed. It is imperative that we find the method that is best suited for each child in our room. If we can foster and model a love of reading to our students, we have the opportunity to make them lifelong readers and learners. It is our intention to implement strategies that may allow the children to develop greater reading fluency, ultimately achieving reading success.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRAREGY

Literature Review

Everybody seems to be searching for the "perfect method" of teaching children to read fluently. However, there is no one "perfect method" for teaching reading to all children (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). "Teachers, policy makers, researchers, and teacher educators need to recognize that the answer is not only in the method, but the teacher" (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 10). Whether it is phonics or whole language based instruction, teachers must not hesitate to modify their methods to meet the needs of children at a given point in time. Effective teachers of reading understand that different students require different methods at different times" (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 13). Children who are exposed to various methods of learning to read fluently will experience greater success as lifelong learners (Koskinen, et al., 1999).

The American Federation of Teachers states that many instructional staff members in elementary schools have never been provided with sufficient preparation on how to teach reading (American Federation of Teachers, 2000). Teachers who are not aware of current developments and research in reading are missing out on vital information. Inservices, professional development, current materials, and guest speakers can help retrain professionals to focus on specific reading problems identified in recent years. Recognizing that there is a lack of money, the necessary materials and programs needed in the classroom must become a top priority.

According to Rasinki and Zutell, there are several effective models to teaching reading fluency. Some of the examples are repeated readings, teacher modeling, fluent oral reading, standards for student mastery of text and pairing students in groups of two to help each other's growth in fluency and reading proficiency (Rasinski & Zutell, 1989).

One strategy that influences reading success is to focus on specific decoding skills. According to the National Reading Panel, for children to succeed in reading they must be taught

> phonemic awareness skills (the ability to manipulate sounds that make up a spoken language), phonics skills (the understanding that there are relationships between letters and sounds), the ability to read fluently with accuracy, speed, and statement, and to apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding and enjoyment of what they read (Langenberg, 2000).

As educators, we know that effective reading instruction encompasses a number of skills using a balanced approach. "A cognitive framework can provide structure to the chaos that surrounds reading and reading instruction by helping teachers understand the difference between the cognitive elements that are developing in the young reader's mind, the reading-related behaviors that the child is displaying, and the activities and instruction that the teacher is providing to teach children to read" (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1999 pp.41). For example, an element of this framework is letter knowledge. This element is crucial in understanding that successful readers know the letters in the alphabet and children who are poor readers have

difficulty recognizing their letters. Once a child develops these elements, certain behaviors emerge. For example, as a child develops letter recognition, "she will point to and name letters in her environment, she will discriminate between numbers and letters, and she is likely to include letters in her attempts at writing" (SEDL, 1999 pp. 44).

As stated by Torgesen, "the best solution to the problem of reading failure is to allocate resources for early identification and prevention" (Torgesen, 1998). If we can identify children at-risk for critical early reading skills, we will be able to implement a preventative plan versus a remedial intervention.

> We have learned that combined instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency development, and reading comprehension strategies, provided by well-trained teachers, can increase reading skills to average reading levels. However, we have also learned that if we delay intervention until nine years of age, approximately 75% of the children will continue to have difficulties learning to read throughout high school (Lyon, 1998 pp.30).

Gaining parental support is an important strategy teachers may use to enhance the reading fluency of their students. According to a study conducted by Bloom in 1981, the home environment was found to be the most powerful variable of support. It showed a correlation of +. 80 between the home environment and school achievement (Bloom, 1988). Homes that encouraged children to read each night saw an increase in their children's reading ability. Alan Rossman (1986-1987, as cited in Bloom, 1988), found that fluent readers scored higher on tests of comprehension and vocabulary. In

that study, he discovered that these students had spent three to four hours a week reading books, magazines, or newspapers. He concluded that once a child has developed the skill of reading fluency, it is likely to be retained for a lifetime (Bloom, 1988). Teachers should have students keep a home reading log where they record the book they read and how long they have read. The teacher can use this to check what the child read and for how long they read. The teacher will also be able to monitor the level at which the child is reading. Once a child becomes a fluent reader, she can concentrate more on the meaning of the text.

Parents need to be informed on how to expose their children to reading at an early age by encouraging children in playing with language through nursery rhymes, storybooks, and writing activities. "It is necessary to bring to children, as early as possible, experiences that help them understand the purposes of reading, and the wonder and joy that can be derived from reading" (Lyon, 1998 pp.39). Parents need to play a key role in the development of their children's vocabulary, grammar, and verbal reasoning. Children in preschool programs should be "introduced to the letters of the alphabet, to discriminate letters from one another, to print letters, and to attempt to spell words they hear" (Lyon, 1998 pp.40). The younger we expose children to print, the more their knowledge of these concepts will increase. Parents and teachers should also be aware of the importance of reading aloud to children to improve vocabulary and listening skills. "Beginning reading programs should be constructed to ensure that adequate instructional time is allotted to the teaching of phonemic awareness skills, phonics skills, the development of reading fluency automatically, and the development of reading comprehension strategies" (Lyon, 1998 pp.40).

While teachers heavily depend on parents to be an important part of their child's reading, they do not supply parents with information necessary to help their children. "There is a need for educators to convey information to parents about how to be a good coach to the beginning reader, rather than just telling parents to read at home more with their children" (Lancy, 1992 p.1). During an Open House, for example, the teacher may take the opportunity to address this topic, as well as give suggestions. Establishing an open relationship between the teacher and parent, is the best approach to helping children become successful readers.

Modeling is another strategy vital for improving reading fluency. To develop a good oral reader, children should have the appropriate reading modeled for them. Having a child listen to a variety of stories from fluent readers will help them develop their own reading fluency. Whether it is teachers or parents, constant modeling should occur. In and out of the classroom, the more that the child hears stories read to them, the more likely they will become good oral readers (Richards, 2000). Teachers and parents need to share past experiences and help children begin their literature experiences (Nathan).

Gaining support from the community surrounding the school is another factor in increasing reading fluency. Founders of the nonprofit organization, Beginning with Books, Joan Friedberg, Ph.D. and Elizabeth Segal, Ph.D., set out to give parents the necessary resources to help parents who are not themselves successful readers (Segal, 2000). Searching for volunteers from the community to read to students may contribute to developing competent readers. Many businesses may encourage employees to devote time mentoring children and volunteering to read to them. After

four years of working with Segal and Friedberg's program, an outside evaluation showed that kindergarten students in the project were significantly higher in language and reading ability (Segal, 2000).

Teachers can also increase the reading fluency of their students by using repeated reading as an instructional strategy. Repeated reading is reading the same passage several times until it is read with comfort and ease. Research on repeated reading has found to increase fluency and vocabulary (Elley, 1989, Kosinen & Blum, 1984, as cited in Koskinen, et. al., 1999) and reading comprehension (Dowhower, 1987; O'Shea & Sindelar, 1985; Yaden, 1988, as cited in Koskinen, et. al., 1999). Repeated reading also helps to gain expression and a better understanding of the text. This strategy allows children to have substantial practice in reading a given text. They can use this method independently, with a parent, or with an audio taped model. A study of first grade ESL (English as a Second Language) students in a school-home program showed many benefits of providing several opportunities for reading practice with audio tapes in school and at home. This program included opportunities for children to read familiar text, to exercise their choice of books, and to do daily shared reading to provide students with an exemplary model. Findings indicated that students demonstrated growth in their abilities to read fluently when given the opportunity to reread books with audio tapes at home (Koskinen, et al., 1999). Through this practice, children built self-confidence in their ability to read fluently.

Previewing is an intervention that is used to help increase fluency. During previewing, students have exposure to a reading text before actually reading the passage (Mastropieri, 1999). When previewing a reading passage students are

exposed to new vocabulary words. Teachers can also go over parts of the passage that may cause troubles for the students during the previewing time (Mastropieri, 1999).

Another approach to improving reading fluency is through the use of multimedia. There are many computer programs that can help with increasing student reading fluency. The Waterford Institute has developed a reading program that helps students with their reading skills. Students spend between 15- 20 minutes daily on a program that is designed for them. During this time students complete a variety of activities like guided reading, writing, songs, and games. All of these activities are set for each individual student. The Waterford Program also has supplemental books, tapes, compact discs, videos, and activities that support the program (Electronic Education, 2000).

Reader's Theater is yet another way to develop children's reading fluency. Reader's Theater is an interpretive reading activity in which readers use their voices to bring characters to life. The goal is to read a script aloud effectively, enabling the audience to visualize the action (Martinez, Rose, & Strecker, 1999). One study of second grade students using Reader's Theater aimed to increase reading fluency. The teacher had a five-day instructional plan spending 30 minutes per day on Reader's Theater. The first day, the teacher modeled fluency by reading aloud and offered mini-lessons on explanations of specific aspects of fluency. After discussing the stories, the students read the scripts independently or with a partner. On the second and third days, the students practiced in groups and received their assigned roles. The fourth day was spent reading and practicing the script. Finally, the fifth day was devoted to performing to an audience. Over the ten-week project, there was an average rate

increase of 17 words per minute for these second graders, and an average of 6.9 words per minute for the comparison group of students (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). These children achieved greater reading fluency because of the created opportunity to perform before an audience requiring them to reread a given text multiple times.

Another way to help students develop reading fluency is through the fluency development lesson (FDL). This is an activity that is completed daily with students. Each day students read a passage that has 50 - 150 words. A different passage is used each day, reusing passages at different times. Passages that are chosen are poems, songs, and other text that have rhythm (Rasinski, 1994). The steps for implementing FDL are first the passages are introduced to the students. Then the teacher models fluent reading of the passage. Next the class talks about the passage. Then students read the passage together several times. The students are then divided into pairs; with each person reading the selection three times. The listener supports the reader and responses to the reading. After the small group readings students are than able to perform the selection (Rasinski, 1994).

As educators, we need to be aware of the different strategies and tools that can help many at-risk children become successful readers. Children who are struggling to read need more than just short-term interventions. It is our job to find the approaches that will develop fluent readers. Alerman & Guthrie's study showed that expert readers are engaged readers who are motivated, knowledgeable, socially interactive, and strategic (as cited in Dowhower, 1999). Instilling a love of reading in a child can create an expert reader. If a child loves to read, he or she will do so more often. By creating an environment in the classroom that is conducive to socializing and shared reading,

the teacher is making it possible for each student to engage in learning. The amount that a child reads is related to his or her success as a reader.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of various strategies used to increase reading fluency during the period of September 2000 and January 2001, the targeted first, second, and third grade students will increase their abilities to read fluently as measured through teacher observation, miscue analysis, reading portfolios, surveys, logs, inventories, journals and anecdotal records, and parent questionnaires.

In order to accomplish the project objectives the following processes are necessary:

1. Teachers and other fluent readers will model appropriate reading for a given text.
2. Students will engage in cooperative grouping and multiple intelligence activities.
3. Students will keep reading portfolios as a tool for monitoring reading progress.
4. Students will complete a home reading log.
5. The teacher will track reading progress through observation and anecdotal records.
6. The teacher will assess individually through a monthly miscue analysis.
7. Students and parents will complete reading reflections and questionnaires upon completion of this research.

8. The teacher will implement the following strategies throughout the research: phonics, paired reading, Reader's Theatre, repeated reading, auditory modeling, and guided reading.

Action Plan

The following action research is intended to improve the reading fluency of our students between the dates of September 2000 and January 2001. We will begin by assessing the reading fluency of each student. As a result of this, we feel it is imperative to devise a plan of action according to their attitudes about reading. For example, the interest inventory form gives us insight into what each child enjoys reading.

The curriculum involves using a wide variety of literatures, including basal readers, trade books, and novel studies. These activities will be implemented using both cooperative grouping and multiple intelligence strategies. This will enable children to have meaningful experiences with literature.

As we begin this intervention, we will provide a daily model of proficient oral reading. The teacher will set aside 15 minutes a day for this modeling. Parents and community members will be encouraged to participate in this modeling. We feel it is vital for students to see the importance of reading from others who value literature.

The reading portfolios will be used weekly as a tool to monitor their reading progress and as a form of assessment for the teacher. Included in these portfolios are the following: surveys, logs, inventories, journals, and general observations.

On a monthly basis, the children will be required to produce their home reading logs. In addition to this, the teacher will track their reading progress through oral reading observation forms and anecdotal records.

The students are individually assessed quarterly according to the miscue analysis form administered by the teacher. The triad reading evaluation form is also used quarterly by the teacher/student/parent.

Concluding our research, the students will be given the reading reflection and survey. Again, the parents will be asked to fill out a parent questionnaire and a reading attitude inventory.

Methods of Assessment

The effectiveness of our research intervention plan will be measured using a variety of assessment tools. Reading portfolios are an accurate measurement of each child's progress. The portfolios will contain samples of surveys, logs, journals, miscue analysis forms, inventories, and general observations. Through the use of portfolios both the teacher and student have a way to continually monitor the strengths and weaknesses of each child's reading. Pre-intervention and post-intervention data will be compared to measure the growth of the students' reading fluencies.

Chapter 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to increase the reading fluency of the targeted first, second, and third grade classrooms. The implementation of repeated reading, cooperative groupings, multiple intelligence strategies, paired reading, Reader's Theatre, auditory monitoring, and guided reading were intended to achieve the desired results.

During the month of September, the interventions began with data collection from colleagues, parents, and students. The students were given a reading survey, self-evaluation, and an interest inventory (Appendix D-H). Daily, the students were exposed to a 15-minute read aloud by the teacher. On a weekly basis, the students' reading progress was monitored through oral reading observations, anecdotal records, and home reading logs.

During the month of October, several interventions were implemented. Through classroom routines, the following strategies were used: paired reading, repeated reading, Reader's Theatre, guided reading, auditory modeling, and a variety of strategies to help improve decoding skills. Weekly, the students' reading progress was monitored through oral reading observations, anecdotal records, and

home reading logs. To conclude this month, a miscue analysis was administered to determine the students' reading levels.

Through the months of November and December, the interventions continued. The researchers continued to expose the students to 15 minute read alouds by the teacher. Again, the students' reading progress was monitored weekly through oral reading observations, anecdotal records, and home reading logs.

January was the last month of interventions including paired reading, cooperative learning, Reader's Theatre, guided reading, and repeated reading. Daily, the students were exposed to auditory modeling of reading by the teacher. Oral reading observations, oral reading records, and home reading logs continued to be assessed on a weekly basis. The end of this month concluded the research with a final miscue analysis and parent and student surveys.

Site A consisted of two classrooms. Class A is a second grade room with thirty students. In the beginning of the interventions, there were a number of students struggling with reading fluency. As the research progressed, their abilities to read orally improved. The researcher found that repeated readings had a profound impact on the students' comfort level, fluency, and motivation to read. The researcher found the miscue analyses tests to be an invaluable tool to assess the needs of the students' reading fluency. Upon completion of the research, the students had made great strides in their oral reading ability. The researcher also found that as the students' ability levels rose, so did their motivation to read. It was a turning point in the research for class A when the students went from learning to read to reading to learn.

At Site A, class B consisted of twenty-four third grade students. The researcher found that the students who were at a dependent reading level benefited from the use of literature circles in the classroom. During literature circles, the students were exposed to a wide variety of literatures from different authors, genres, and cultures. The students flourished in the process of these circles because of the active participation required. A variety of roles were assigned that enabled the students to direct their own learning.

The students at Site B consisted of eighteen second grade students ranging between the ages of seven and nine. At the beginning of this research, some students were well below grade level while others were at or above. After implementing the strategies, the students who were well below grade level became fairly average second grade readers. These students enjoyed most of the implemented strategies, but most of all were the literature circles, the books on tape, and Reader's Theatre. They enjoyed sharing rich literature in a cooperative group setting as well as having quiet time to enjoy a book independent while listening to the story on tape. Reader's Theatre was also quite enjoyable for the students, especially the below average readers. They gained self-confidence as they performed a well-rehearsed script in front of different audiences. These interventions proved to be influential in their reading progress.

Site C was a first grade classroom with eighteen students participating in the research. The student's ages ranged from six to eight years old. When the research began, a small number of students were independent readers. Many of the students were at a dependent reading level. At the end of the research, most of the students were at an independent reading level and just a few remained dependent readers. All

of the interventions worked well in the classroom. The students at Site C truly enjoyed repeated reading. Whenever given the chance to listen to stories on tape, they would get excited. Different faculty members from the school recorded many of the stories they would hear. The students would listen repeatedly to stories trying to figure out who was reading the story. The students were always excited to start new stories for Reader's Theatre. Paired reading was a favorite way of reading stories for the students. Home reading also had an important part in the students' progress. The students had monthly challenges to meet. Many of the students went beyond their challenges to see who could read the most. The use of decoding skills had the greatest impact on the students' reading fluency. During the course of the intervention, the researcher at Site C witnessed students using their newly developed decoding skills during oral reading.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of the reading fluencies of the targeted classes, student portfolios were kept. The portfolios contained a variety of interventions. The interventions included student interest surveys, reading logs, miscue analyses, parent questionnaires, oral observation forms, and running reading records. These data were collected and assessed on a monthly basis by the researchers. These interventions appeared to have a positive effect on the reading progress and fluencies of the targeted students. There was a significant increase in the students' attitudes toward reading. In addition, the students demonstrated an increase in their reading comprehension, decoding skills, fluency, ability to make predictions and inferences, draw conclusions, and use context clues. Demonstrating growth with these skills allowed the students to become more independent with their reading.

According to the results and analysis of the data on reading fluency, the students showed an improvement in their reading progress and attitudes found through the results of the miscue analyses tests. The miscue analyses tests gave the researchers the opportunity to find students strengths and weaknesses within their reading. The researchers were able to address the areas of concern as each student read the passage. Site A had a remarkable increase in independent reading, bringing the total number of students at an independent reading level to 91%. This was an increase of 55% over the course of this research. The students' comfort level while reading aloud in class rose 24%, bringing the total to 62% of the students feeling comfortable reading orally.

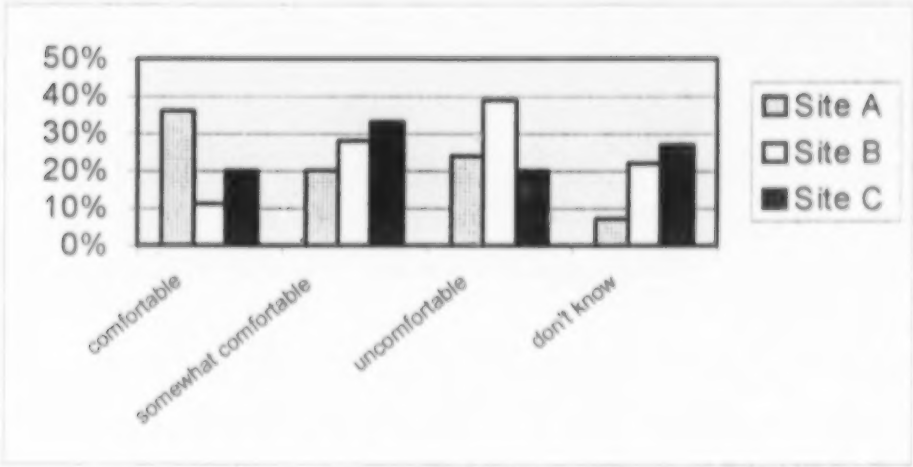
At the beginning of the research at Site A, we felt the level of reading fluency the students were demonstrating was not grade appropriate. Following summer vacation, it was obvious to us which children read daily either with or without an adult. As educators, we found it interesting to read the parent surveys because the results showed a lack of reading in the home environment. There was an alarming rate of children who are not read to or exposed to literature within the home. We felt that this had a direct impact on their reading abilities and progress. The children were not given the consistent modeling necessary for proper reading development. After implementing many of the strategies, we saw a slow, yet consistent increase in their reading abilities. We felt the miscue analyses tests to be insightful and indicative of the areas of concern for each child's progress in reading. Concluding the interventions, we found our research to be successful in increasing the students comfort level and reading abilities.

The students at Site B demonstrated growth in their abilities to read fluently. Overall, it was an increase with steady growth. The students did not show a large increase in their abilities, but they demonstrated enough progress to become independent readers. Most importantly, the students learned strategies that would allow them to continue to progress as a fluent reader. Ninety percent of the students demonstrated the ability to read at an independent or instructional level at the beginning of the research. At the conclusion of this research, there was a 4% increase in the total number of students at an independent or instructional reading level.

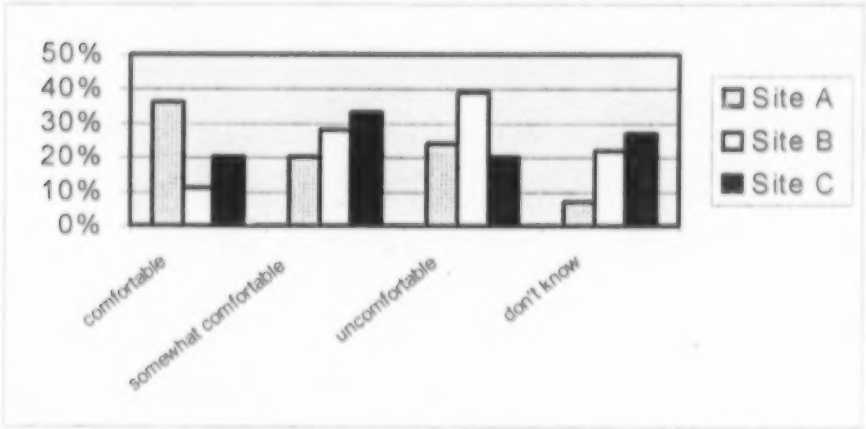
At the beginning of the research, 33% of the students at Site C were at an independent reading level. There was a dramatic increase of 50%, bringing the total number of independent readers to 83% at the conclusion of the research. Additionally, the comfort level of the students reading aloud rose from 27% to 38%.

The students' of Site A consisted of two classrooms. One classroom, Class A, was a self-contained regular education classroom consisting of thirty second grade students. The other classroom, Class B, was a self-contained regular education classroom with twenty-four third grade students. Class A had the same thirty students and parents in the beginning and end of the research. Class B also began and ended with the same twenty-four students and parents. Site B was a self-contained regular education second grade classroom consisting of eighteen students. The same eighteen students and parents participated in the research. Site C was a self-contained regular education first grade classroom consisting of eighteen students. The same eighteen students and parents participated in the research.

Figure 11



Pre-intervention Data



Post-intervention Data

Figure 11 Post-intervention parent survey measuring their child's comfort level while reading aloud in class

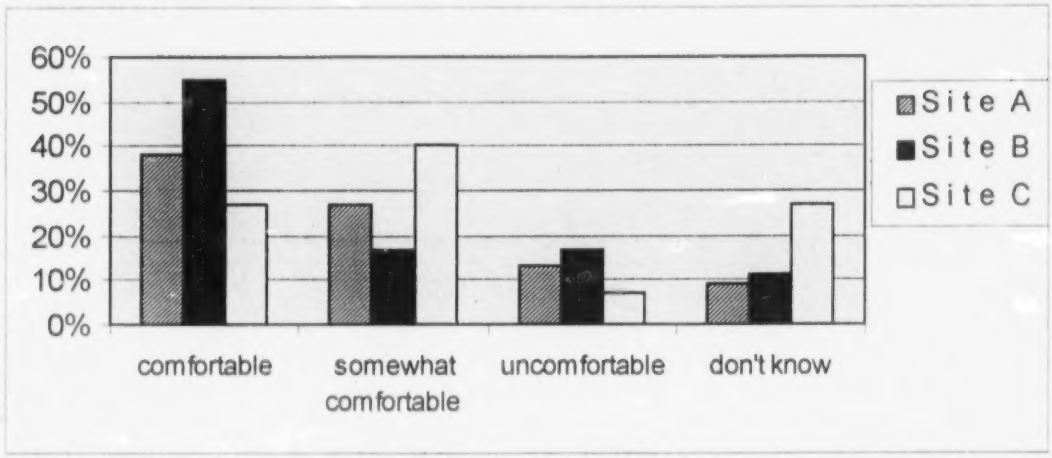
Site A data reflects that 46% of the parents responded that their children are comfortable reading aloud in class. There were 32% who felt they were somewhat

comfortable. Seventeen percent of the parents surveyed responded that their children were uncomfortable, and 5% did not know their children's comfort level. Site B showed 41% of the parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading aloud. Twenty-three percent felt their children to be somewhat comfortable. Thirty-three percent of the parents surveyed responded that their children were uncomfortable while reading aloud, and 3% of the parents did not know their children's comfort level. Site C responded with 38% of the parents feeling that their children were comfortable reading aloud. Thirty-three percent felt that their children were somewhat comfortable, 29% felt their children to be uncomfortable, and none of the parents did not know their children's comfort level.

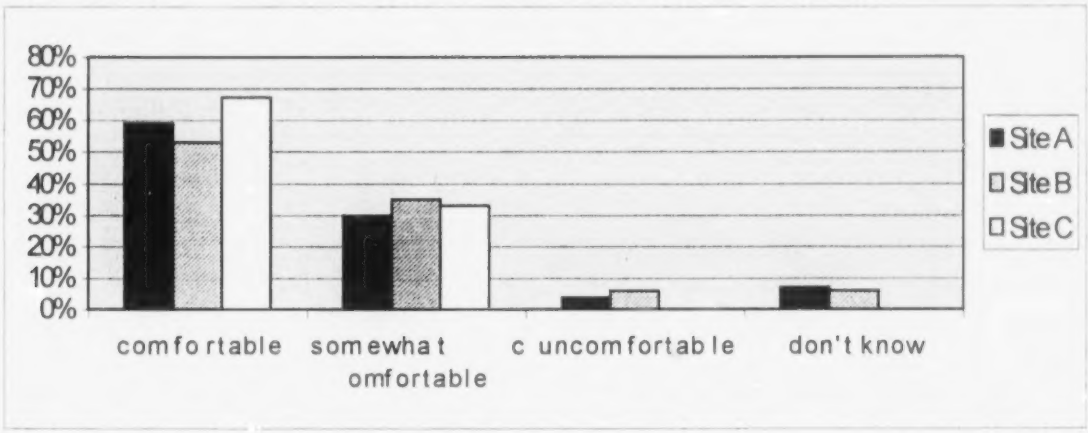
The research data reflects an overall 58% increase in the children's comfort level while reading in class at all three sites. Site A showed an increase of 10%, Site B showed a 30% increase, while Site C had an 18% rise in their children's comfort levels.

This data reflects a significant amount of growth in the parent's feelings of their children's comfort levels. Site A increased by 10%, Site B increased 30%, while Site C increased by 18%. There was also an increase in the parent's responding to their children being somewhat comfortable while reading aloud at Site A by 12%. All sites increased in the parent's feelings about their children being uncomfortable while reading. Site A increased by 7%, Site B by 6% and Site C by 9%. A dramatic decrease was shown at Site B and C with the parent's who did not know their children's comfort levels while reading aloud. Site B decreased 19% and Site C decreased by 27%. This data reflects the progress seen by the parents as a result of the interventions.

Figure 12



Pre-intervention Data



Post-intervention Data

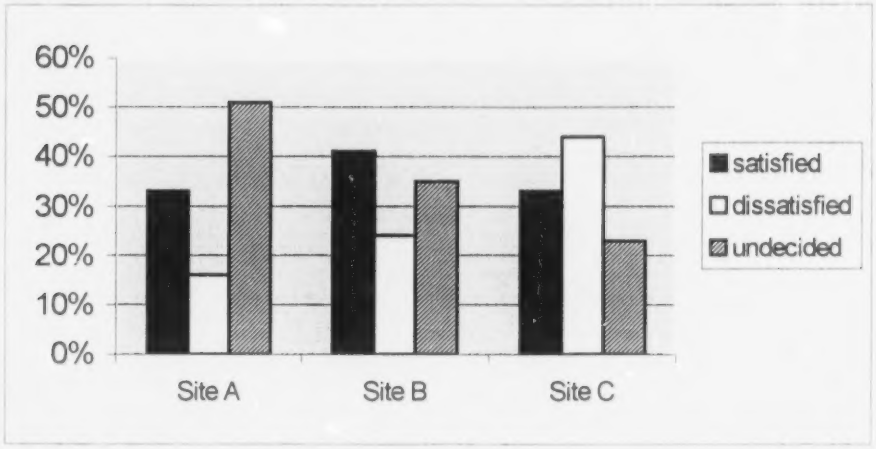
Figure 12 Pre and post-intervention parent survey measuring their child's comfort level while reading to the teacher

Site A data reflects 59% of the parents responded that their children were comfortable reading to the teacher. There were 30% who felt they were somewhat comfortable. Four percent of the parents responded that their children were

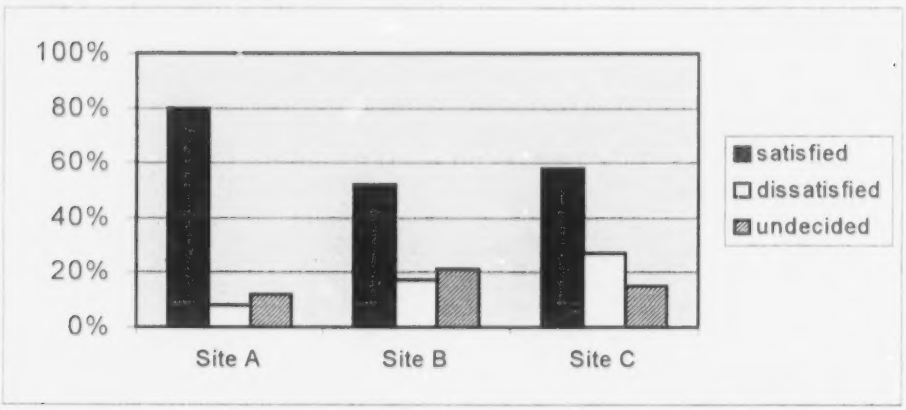
uncomfortable with reading to the teacher, and 7% did not know their children's comfort level. Site B showed 53% of the parents responded that their children felt comfortable reading aloud to the teacher. Thirty-five percent felt their children to be somewhat comfortable while reading to the teacher. Six percent of the parents responded that their children were uncomfortable while reading to the teacher, and 6% of the parents did not know. Site C responded with 67% of the parents feeling that their children were comfortable reading aloud to the teacher. Thirty-three percent felt that their children were somewhat comfortable. None of the parents felt their children were uncomfortable while reading to the teacher. None did not know their children's feelings.

Between the three sites there was a 59% increase in the parent's feelings about their children's comfort levels while reading to the teacher. Site A showed a 21% increase while Site B showed a decrease of 2%, and Site C had a 40% increase in their comfort level while reading aloud to the teacher. Again, all three sites reflected an increase in the parent's attitudes about their children feeling somewhat comfortable while reading aloud to the teacher. Site A increased 3%, Site B by 18% and Site C increased 7%. The parent's attitudes about their children feeling uncomfortable while reading aloud to the teacher also decreased. Site A decreased by 9%, Site B by 11% and Site C by 7%. A decrease was shown at all three sites in regards to the parents not knowing their children's comfort levels while reading aloud to the teacher. Site A decreased by 2%, Site B by 5% and Site C decreased 27%. This data reflects an increase of confidence in the parent's attitudes toward their children reading aloud to the teacher. In turn, this demonstrates the increase in the student's comfort while reading to the teacher.

Figure 13



Pre-intervention Data



Post-intervention Data

Figure 13 Pre and Post-intervention parent questionnaire regarding the progress of their child in reading

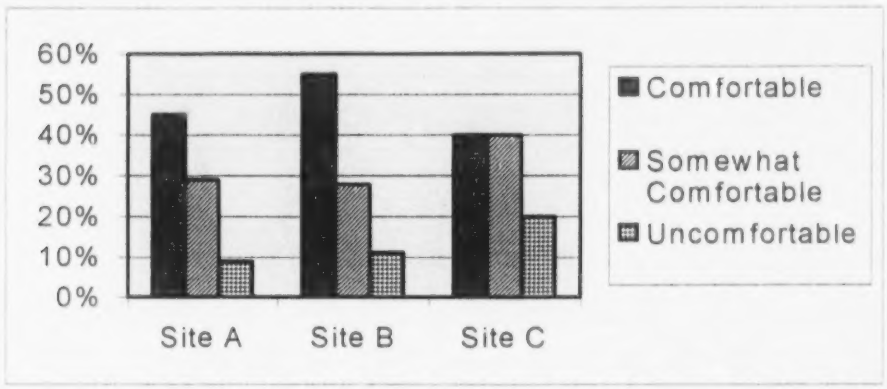
Site A responded with 80% of the parents feeling that their childrens' reading progress was satisfactory. Eight percent were concerned with their children's reading progress, and 12% were undecided about the progress of their children. Site B had 52% of the parents who were satisfied with their childrens' reading progress.

Seventeen percent addressed concerns with their progress and 21% were undecided. Site C had 58% of the parents who felt satisfied with their childrens' reading progress. Twenty-seven percent expressed concerns and 15% were undecided.

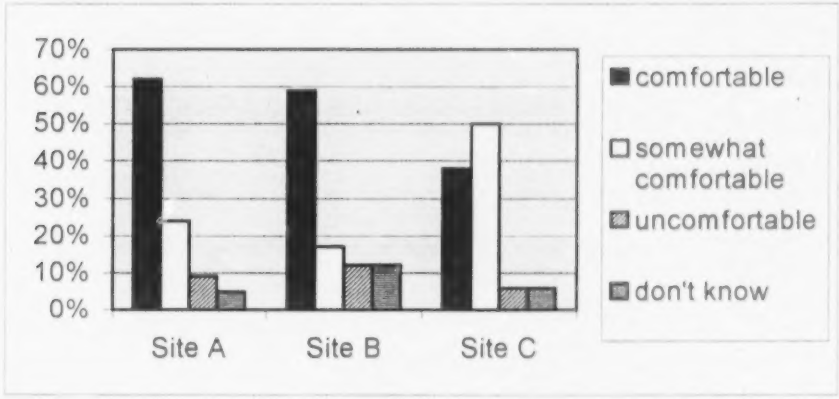
There was an 83% increase among all three sites regarding the parents' feelings about the progress about their childrens' progress in reading. Site A increased by 47%. Site B increased with 11% of the parents feeling their children made improvements. Site C also had an increase with 25% of the parents feeling their children had improved their reading abilities.

All three sites found a significant increase in the satisfaction of the parents in their children's reading ability. Site A found a 47% increase in the number of parents who were satisfied with their children's progress in reading. Site B had an 11% increase, while Site C found a 25% increase in the parents satisfaction of their children's progress in reading. The parents who were dissatisfied with their children's progress in reading also decreased by a significant amount. Site A found a 25% decrease in the concern regarding their children's reading progress. Site B had a 7% decrease, while Site C also decreased by 17% in regards to the parents concern with their children's reading progress. In addition, the number of parents who were undecided with their children's reading progress declined. Site A had a decrease of 39% with parents who were undecided about their children's reading progress. Site B also decreased with 14%, while Site C decreased by 8% with parents who are undecided about their children's reading progress. Given the amount of time the interventions had taken place, these numbers demonstrated significant growth in the parent's feelings towards their children's reading progress.

Figure 14



Pre-intervention Data



Post-intervention Data

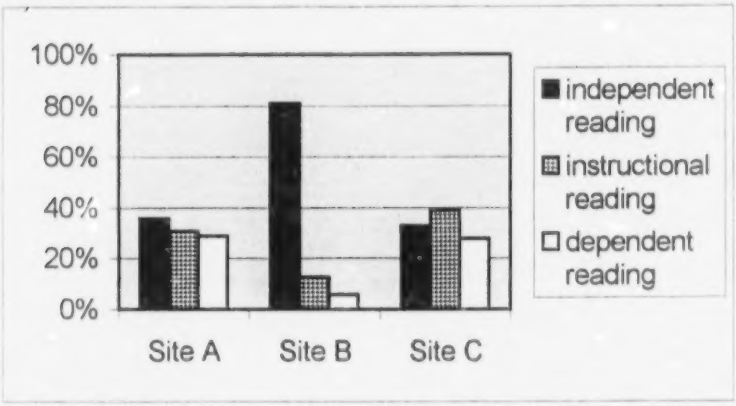
Figure 14 Post-intervention parent survey measuring their childrens' feelings about their ability to read orally

Site A data reflects 62% of the parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading orally. There were 24% who felt they were somewhat comfortable, 9% uncomfortable, and 5% that did not know their childrens' comfort level. Site B showed 59% of the parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading aloud. Seventeen percent felt their child to be somewhat comfortable, 12%

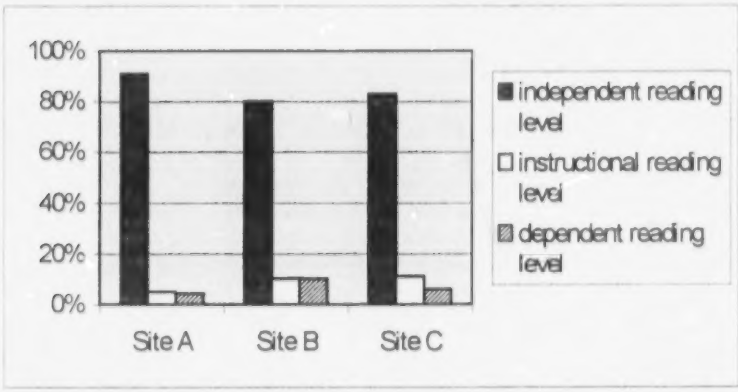
uncomfortable, and 12% of the parents did not know. Site C responded with 38% of the parents feeling that their children were comfortable reading aloud. Fifty percent felt that their children were somewhat comfortable, 6% uncomfortable, and 6% did not known their childrens' comfort level.

Each site had areas of increase and decrease in the parent's feelings toward their children's abilities to read orally. Site A data reflects a 17% increase of the parent's responding that their children felt comfortable reading orally. There was a 2% decrease in the number of parents who felt their children to be somewhat comfortable reading orally. The number of parents who felt their children were uncomfortable remained the same at 9%. There was an increase of 4% in the number of parents who did not know their children's feelings about reading orally. Site B data reflects a 4% increase of the parent's feelings about their children's abilities to read orally. There was an 11% decrease in the number of parents who felt their children to be somewhat comfortable while reading aloud and there was a 1% decrease in the number of parent's who felt their children were uncomfortable. There was a 6% decrease in the number of parents who did not know their children's feelings about their abilities to read orally. Site C decreased 2% with the number of parents responding that their children felt comfortable reading orally. The data reflects a 10% increase in the parent's attitudes about their children being somewhat comfortable, and a 14% decrease in the number of parents who felt their children were uncomfortable reading aloud. There was a 6% increase in the parents responding to a lack of knowledge about their children's comfort levels. Regardless of the discrepancies, the children of the targeted classrooms have continued to demonstrate growth in their abilities to read orally.

Figure 15



Pre-intervention Data



Post-intervention Data

Figure 15 Post-intervention summary of miscue analysis

Site A found that 91% of the students were reading at an independent level. Five percent of the students were functioning at an instructional reading level. Four percent of the students were at a dependent reading level. Site B found that 80% of the students were reading at an independent level. Ten percent were reading at an instructional level and 10% were at a dependent reading level. Site C found that 83% of

the students were at an independent reading level. Eleven percent of the students were at an instructional reading level and 6% were at a dependent reading level.

At the three sites there were over a 100% increase in the childrens' abilities to read at an independent level. Pre-data information at Site A revealed that 36% of the students were reading at an independent level. This site had an increase of 55% at the conclusion of the research. The pre-data results at Site B found that 81% of the students were independent readers. Although there was some progress, post-intervention data remained the same. The pre-data information at Site C reflected that 33% of the students were at an independent reading level. At the conclusion of this research, Site C had an increase of 50%.

All three sites had found that the growth of the students' reading abilities was do to a number of factors. In general, regular classroom teachers had found there was a slight improvement in reading skills through growth and development. However, there were weak oral readers in the beginning of the interventions who made tremendous improvements through the course of this research.

Through the parents' surveys and the nightly reading logs, the parents became aware of the needs of their children as readers. This enabled the parents to become active participants in their children's learning through literacy. This also allowed for better communication among the home and school. The researchers also found that keeping student portfolios and closely monitoring their progress allowed them to address the student concerns in a more immediate manner.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As researchers, we would strongly recommend these interventions as a vehicle to improve the oral reading abilities of students. We found these strategies to be most helpful in assessing our student's progress with reading. It allowed us, as teachers, to focus on specific areas of weakness and intervene promptly. All of the strategies proved to reach a variety of students. Repeated reading provided the students with an opportunity to familiarize them with the text, which enabled them to become fluent with the particular passage. As their comfort levels increased, so did their intonation, fluency, enthusiasm, and comprehension. Reader's Theatre offered the students the opportunity to bring the literature to life through role-playing. This engaged all the students to participate in one way or another, whether it is narration, acting, or directing.

The interventions allowed us to be quite aware of the progress of each student in the classrooms. Through the use of the miscue analyses tests, we were able to accurately assess the students' strengths and weaknesses. While administering this test, we were able to provide the students with immediate feedback and individualized attention.

Although these interventions proved to be most successful, they required an enormous amount of time. The surveys that were administered to parents and faculty required follow-up requests. The student surveys consumed much of the necessary instructional time. A great deal of organization was required in order to maintain the accuracy of the surveys.

Implications to Teaching

A trend we have seen in our classrooms over the past few years has been the decline in phonemic awareness, parental involvement, and ultimately, reading fluency. Fortunately, this year we have had the opportunity to make a difference in our classrooms pertaining to these issues. We are extremely proud of the strides made by our students and ourselves due to the research process. We have learned many important strategies necessary for reading progress. Keeping the student portfolios allowed us to closely monitor the progress of each child. Never before have we been able to track the fluency of the children in our classrooms so accurately. This accuracy enabled us to focus on specific skills our students were lacking. We found this not only increased their abilities to read, but made a dramatic impact in motivating them to read and become confident, independent readers. We now feel better equipped to assess their needs as readers and provide the tools necessary to become fluent readers. These newly learned strategies will remain part of our reading programs. Through the use of the home reading logs and surveys, the parents have remained an important part of the reading process. The parents have now been given the necessary information to take part in their children's reading. We have impressed upon them the importance of working as a team to achieve one common goal. This goal is to instill the love of reading in each and every child. We hope to continue to make the difference in the reading abilities of our students through the use of these interventions.

Using the different strategies with the students proved to be beneficial in the classroom. The students were monitored more closely this year than in the past. When a problem occurred with a child's ability to read, it was recognized and solved before

impeding the learning of any given student. We felt this close monitoring of the students will continue in our classrooms. The students looked forward to the repeated reading with books on tape. If it were not assigned first thing in the morning, the students would enthusiastically remind the researchers to do so. This provided the students with auditory modeling necessary for fluent reading. Using guided reading with the students helped them become consciously aware of strategies they needed to become fluent readers. At the conclusion of this research, the students showed a higher interest in reading, therefore giving them more confidence as independent readers. This high interest in their reading was directly related to the students becoming fluent readers. A major goal was accomplished by instilling the love of reading.

Reflecting upon the past two years, we have found a renewed enthusiasm for teaching. We have come away from this research with vital tools in assessing student reading fluency. Looking back at the beginning of this research, we have observed a tremendous amount of progress in the students' abilities to read. What a satisfying feeling knowing we were part of that success. We feel we are the best example of cooperative learning for our students as we demonstrated through this action research. We embraced the diversity each researcher brought to the group. It was through this diversity that we learned what makes our classrooms unique. We have learned through this journey, although somewhat tumultuous, that the end justified the means. The hard work we put into this research is evident through our students' progress and enthusiasm for reading.

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Dear Laura,

I am completing my masters program and I would like permission to use materials from the Language Arts Assessment grade 1-2 workbook. It will be a part of the appendix at the end of my research paper.

Thank you,
Peggy Brander

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Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Consent Form

St. Xavier University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving the Reading Fluency of our Children

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am part of a Field-Based Masters Program through St. Xavier University and am implementing research on improving reading fluency in the classroom. As part of the research project, each child will receive a reading portfolio, which will remain in the classroom. This portfolio will contain reading inventories, surveys, logs, and general observations of your child's progress. In addition to the research collected on your child, we will also ask for your participation by having you occasionally fill out parent surveys. Please be aware that all research participation is voluntary and will be kept confidential. Non-participation in this study will not affect your child's grade. The results of this research will be used in an attempt to increase the reading fluency of the students in the classroom.

Please complete the bottom portion of this letter and return it with the completed survey. If you have any questions regarding this research, please call me at school.

Thank You,

.....

I, _____the parent/ guardian
of_____ understand the nature of this research. The teacher listed above has explained what this study entails and that our participation is voluntary and all material will be kept confidential. I freely consent to both my participation and my child's in this study.

Signature_____

Date_____

St. Xavier University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Improving the Reading Fluency of our Children

Dear Colleague,

I am part of a Field-Based Masters Program through St. Xavier University and am implementing research on improving reading fluency in the classroom. As part of the research project, it would be helpful to receive your input about reading fluency. I would greatly appreciate you taking the time to share your expertise about reading on the attached survey. Please be assured that your insights will remain completely confidential. The results of this research will be used in an attempt to increase the reading fluency of the students in my classroom.

Please complete the bottom portion of this letter and return it with the completed survey. Once again, thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

I, _____ understand the nature of this research. The teacher listed above has explained what this study entails and that my participation is voluntary and all material will be kept confidential. I freely consent to my participation in this study.

Signature_____

Date_____